

The rise of the Third Reich and the origins of the Second World War

War alliances against a common enemy are proverbially ephemeral, for once the enemy has been defeated the alliance's centre of gravity is destroyed. There was little reason to suppose that the entente between America, France, and Great Britain, which won the First World War, would be more durable than the Holy League after Lepanto, or the congress of victorious powers after Waterloo. But when compared with the latter there was a profound difference: whereas after the final defeat of Napoleon, for 100 years the *Pax Britannica* maintained a balance of power between the squabbling nations of Europe, during the First World War it was destroyed and after it, thanks to American participation in the war, it was replaced by the League of Nations, an instrument designed neither to remove the causes which had precipitated the war, nor to re-establish the balance of power which had perished in it. Instead it rigidly imposed a peace on the world on lines which conformed neither to history, nor to geography, nor to economics. Instead of being designed as a permanent conference of sovereign Powers for the settlement by discussion of disputes between its members, it was fashioned as an autocratic instrument which legalized war against any Power which threatened its members' territorial integrity and political independence, and outlawed all other forms of war. It was a covenant of words without the sword, which caused ever-increasing discontent and friction and, as a reaction to its futile and ingenuous efforts, led to an outcrop of tyrants who challenged authority and exploited its impotence.

Among these artists of power were two men possessed of a new philosophy—Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. They challenged the myth of Economic Man, the fundamental factor in Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism, and exalted in its stead the myth of Heroic Man. This myth has been clearly defined by that remarkable French soldier René Quinton, in his *Maximes sur la guerre*:¹

¹ Translated into English by Douglas Jerrold under the title *Soldier's Testament* (1939), from which the quotations are taken.

"The hero is the man who forgets himself for others. . . . Nature created the hero not to live but to serve . . . The hero is unique among men because his life is the apotheosis of devotion and not of effort. . . . Wars give back religion to men who have lost it. . . . It is security of life that has killed the gods. . . . By death man saves the life of the world. . . . Ideas, not men, are the founders of races."

In Hitler's eyes the aims of international Capitalism and Marxism were one and the same. Both, he said, repudiated "the aristocratic principle of Nature"; both were destroyers of quality, not of things but of life. He held that both lacked the self-justification of sacrifice, fought against Nature, and were destroyers of the race. Hence his creed of the blood, cryptically embalmed in his dogma "*ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*", which perversely he adulterated with confused ideas on Aryanism and Teutonic superiority, mixed with vitriolic hatred for the Jews. Like Cromwell, he created an Association, not of tapsters and decayed serving men, but of men of spirit who "made some conscience of what they did." And when we turn to his autobiographical bible—*Mein Kampf*—we find remarkable parallels to the maxims of René Quinton:

"Men do not die for business but for ideals. . . . He who would live must fight. He who does not wish to fight in this world, where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist. . . . To recover Germany's power you must not ask 'How are we to manufacture arms?' but 'How are we to breed the spirit that makes a people capable of bearing arms?' . . . The greatness of the Aryan is not based on his intellectual powers; but rather on his willingness to devote all his faculties to the service of the community. . . . This mental attitude, which forces self-interest to recede into the background in favour of the common weal, is the first pre-requisite of any kind of really human civilization. . . . The renunciation of one's own life for the sake of the community is the crowning significance of the idea of all sacrifice. . . . Posterity will not remember those who pursued only their own individual interests, but it will praise those heroes who renounced their own happiness."

The comments of Peter F. Druker on this creed are illuminating. "It is a common and stupid mistake," he writes in *The End of Economic Man*, "to look at this exaltation of sacrifice in totalitarianism as mere hypocrisy, self-deception, or a propaganda stunt. It grew

out of deepest despair. Just as nihilism in the Russia of 1880 attracted the noblest and bravest of the young people, so in Germany and Italy it was the best, not the worst representatives of the post-war generation who refused to compromise with a world that had no genuine values worth dying for and no valid creed worth living for."

Unless the struggle between these two myths—Economic Man and Heroic Man—is accepted and understood, the cataclysm which in 1939 submerged the world is almost incomprehensible and the age to which it gave birth little more than the plaything of chance.

Hitler, an Austrian by parentage, was born at Braunau-am-Inn on April 20, 1889, and when on the outbreak of war in 1914 he enlisted into the 16th Bavarian Infantry Regiment, no other recruit had a better claim to be called "the complete proletarian." Through sheer merit, he won the Military Service Cross with Swords, the Regimental Diploma for Gallantry, and the first-class order of the Iron Cross. Yet, strange to say, he never rose above the rank of corporal.

While the victors of the war inscribed their triumph on the memorial they erected at Rethondes in the forest of Compiègne, which read: "*Ici le 11 Novembre 1918 succomba le criminel orgueil de l'empire Allemand, vaincu par les peuples libres qu'il prétendait asservir*", Corporal Hitler lay in hospital at Pasewalk in Pomerania half-blinded by poison gas. Little did they suspect that a day would dawn when this obscure soldier would at the foot of that same monument receive the surrender of the eagles of France and carry his swastika flag from the Atlantic to the Volga.

What was the power which enabled him to achieve this? In part his political genius, also in part his remarkable gift of leadership, but above all that he believed himself to be the divinely appointed regenerator of the Germanic peoples. He was a god-intoxicated man, the spiritual precipitate of the law of retribution, that he who soweth iniquity shall reap calamity.

The demons that exalted him were the Treaty of Versailles, which bore no resemblance to Wilson's Fourteen Points—"Quatorze commandements! C'est un peu raide!" had cried Clemenceau, "*Le bon Dieu n'en avait que dix!*"—the invasion of the Ruhr by Poincaré in 1923, which debauched the German currency and wiped out the German middle classes; the influx of £750 m. in foreign loans between 1924 and 1930, which debauched the German people,

and lastly the crash on the American stock exchange, which began the world-wide monetary depression of 1929-1931.

In 1930, 17,500,000 Germans were supported by the State, and in 1931 the Communist electorate in Germany rose to over five million. In that year the American journalist H. R. Knickerbocker in his book *Germany—Fascist or Soviet?* estimated that at least 15 million Germans were partially starving; that two-thirds of the voters were hostile to Capitalism, and more than half were hostile to the existing political system called democracy. In the following year these calamities led to Hitler's triumph. In 1919—a "human-nothing", as he called himself—he had become the seventh member of an obscure political group the six members of which called themselves "the German Workers' Party". In 1932, this party, renamed the "National Socialist German Workers' Party", gained 13,779,017 votes out of 36 million votes in the July Reichstag elections, and on January 30, 1933, President Hindenburg called upon Hitler, leader of the largest political party in Germany, to fill the appointment of Chancellor and form a government. A year later, on June 30, Hitler purged his party in a series of hideous assassinations in which Ernst Röhm, General von Schleicher and General von Bredow, Gregor Strasser, and many hundreds of others were murdered. Lastly, when on August 2, Field-Marshal Hindenburg died, the office of President was abolished, and Hitler became Führer of the German people.

Save by those who witnessed it, the exultation of the masses on Hitler's advent to power is unbelievable, and when early in 1934 Rudolf Hess swore in the entire party to Hitler in a mass spectacle which brought millions of people to the microphone the words he spoke were those which echoed in every German heart. He said: "By this oath we again bind our lives to a man, through whom—this is our belief—superior forces act in fulfilment of Destiny. Do not seek Adolf Hitler with your brains; all of you will find him with the strength of your hearts. Adolf Hitler is Germany and Germany is Adolf Hitler. Germany is our God on earth."

Whether this extraordinary man was devil or madman, as his enemies proclaimed him to be, in no way belittles the fact that he stamped out Bolshevism in Germany and accomplished astonishing things. The truth would appear to be that he was a Jekyll and Hyde,¹ at one moment a normal being and at another an

¹ The writer, who met Hitler on a number of occasions, is of opinion that he possessed a dual-personality. At one moment he was Adolf, like any normal man, and at another *Herr Gott*, when to argue with him was, of course, absurd.

inspired paranoid. If that is not the truth it is difficult to explain how so intelligent a man as Lloyd George, on his return to England after a visit to Hitler in 1936, could say: "I have never seen a happier people than the Germans. Hitler is one of the greatest of the many great men I have ever met"; and that Winston Churchill in *Step by Step* could write of him: "If our country were defeated, I hope we should find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations."

Hitler's goal was Napoleonic: to establish a German Continental System under the aegis of Germany. Also, his means were not far removed from those of the great emperor: to liberate Germany from the shackles of international loan-capitalism, to unite all Germanic peoples into the Third Reich, and to establish in eastern Europe what he called the German *Lebensraum* (living space) which he considered as essential to the economic security of Germany as Napoleon had considered the Confederation of the Rhine essential to the strategic security of France.

Hitler held that, as long as the international monetary system was based on gold, a nation which cornered gold could impose its will on those who lacked it. This could be done by drying up their sources of exchange, and thereby compelling them to accept loans on interest in order to distribute their wealth—their production. He said: "The community of the nation does not live by the fictitious value of money, but by real production which in its turn gives value to money. This production is the real cover of the currency, and not a bank or a safe full of gold."¹ He decided: (1) To refuse foreign interest-bearing loans, and base German currency on production instead of on gold. (2) To obtain imports by direct exchange of goods—barter—and subsidize exports when necessary. (3) To put a stop to what was called "freedom of the exchanges"—that is, licence to gamble in currencies and shift private fortunes from one country to another according to the political situation. And (4) to create money when men and

¹ Mr. Churchill, who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, reintroduced the gold standard in Britain in 1925, in 1931 held identical views. He said: "Is the progress of the human race in this age of almost terrifying expansion to be arbitrarily barred and regulated by fortuitous discoveries of gold mines? . . . Are we to be told that human civilization and society would have been impossible if gold had not happened to be an element in the composition of the globe? . . . These are absurdities; but they are becoming dangers and deadly absurdities. . . . I therefore point to this evil and to the search for the methods of remedying it as the first, second and the third of all the problems which should command and rivet our thoughts."

material were available for work instead of running into debt by borrowing it.

Because the life of international finance depended upon the issue of interest-bearing loans to nations in economic distress, Hitler's economics spelt its ruination. If he were allowed to succeed, other nations would certainly follow his example, and should a time come when all non-gold-holding governments exchanged goods for goods, not only would borrowing cease and gold lose its power, but the money-lenders would have to close shop.

This financial pistol was pointed more particularly at the United States, because they held the bulk of the world's supply of gold, and because their mass-production system necessitated the export of about 10 per cent. of their products in order to avoid unemployment. Further, because the brutalities meted out to German Jews by Hitler understandably had antagonized American Jewish financiers, six months after Hitler became Chancellor, Samuel Untermyer, a wealthy New York attorney, threw down the challenge. He proclaimed a "holy war" against National Socialism and called for an economic boycott of German goods, shipping, and services. Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State, under the terms of the Trade Agreement Act of 1934, insisted that American foreign trade should not be undercut by exchange controls, government monopolies, and the barter system.

Between 1933 and 1936, Hitler had reduced German unemployment from six millions to one, and prosperity had so far returned that, like Arthur Balfour in 1907, in 1936 Winston Churchill is reported to have said to General Robert E. Wood of America: "Germany is getting too strong and we must smash her." Then in September, 1937, a new American depression set in and developed with such startling rapidity that, on October 19, the stock market collapsed, and in the following month the census of unemployment showed about 11 million totally unemployed and 5,500,000 partially so. Something had to be done to divert public attention from this desperate internal situation—especially as the presidential elections were impending—and on October 5, at Chicago, President Roosevelt delivered his notorious "Quarantine Speech". He spoke of "a haunting fear of calamity . . . the present reign of terror . . . the very foundations of civilization are seriously threatened . . . let no one imagine that America

will escape, that the Western Hemisphere will not be attacked", and that the easiest measure to enforce moral standards was an international quarantine against aggressors. Soon after this the main aggressor was named. Mr. Bernard Baruch told General George C. Marshall that "We are going to lick that fellow Hitler. He isn't going to get away with it". With what? Presumably his barter system, for in September, 1939, Baruch released a report of an interview he had with the President in which he said: "If we keep our prices down, there is no reason why we shouldn't get the customers from the belligerent nations that they have had to drop because of the war. In that event Germany's barter system will be destroyed."

In Great Britain a similar challenge to the barter system was in full blast, and on March 9, 1939, the Polish Ambassador in London reported to his Government that Mr. R. S. Hudson, the Parliamentary Secretary for Overseas Trade, had said to him: "The British Government were . . . determined not to abandon a single European market and not to renounce their economic advantages in favour of the German Reich. . . . Today we are making negotiations in the economic sphere and shattering the German barter system." So fiercely was the economic war waged that Robert E. Sherwood records in *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins* that, in April, 1939, the acting military attaché in the American embassy at Berlin reported: "The present situation when viewed in the light of an active war which Germany is now in the process of waging becomes clear. It is an economic war in which Germany is fighting for her very existence. Germany must have markets for her goods or die and Germany will not die."

When we consider these economic causes of the Second World War it must be borne in mind, like with those of the first, that the struggle between the two economic systems is not a question of right and wrong, but of survival values. It was no more right or wrong for loan-capitalism to fight for its supremacy than it was for Hitler to fight for his barter system. Each was vital to the party concerned; both were the product of trade competition—the curse born of the Industrial Revolution.

Besides this cause of war, between 1933 and 1939 others helped to inflame the international situation, and of these the most important was the violence with which Hitler set out to carry out his programme of German regeneration. Firstly, on October 19,

1933, in order to clear his political decks, he withdrew from the League, and secondly, to secure Germany's eastern flank, on January 26, 1934, he entered on a 10 year peace pact with Poland, which in September was in part neutralized when the Soviet Union joined the League. Next, once the Saar plebiscite had gone in favour of Germany, on March 16, 1935, Hitler repudiated the arms provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and reintroduced conscription, which he justified by pointing at the enormous Soviet army. On May 2 this was countered by the Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance, which made nonsense of the League, as also did the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 18, by which the strength of the German fleet was fixed at 35 per cent. of the British fleet.

The next crisis was further to increase Hitler's power and to bankrupt the League. In accordance with the secret treaties of the World War, Italy had been promised economic control in Abyssinia and, in order to purchase peace in Tunisia, in January, 1935, France had made a deal with Mussolini over Abyssinia—a member of the League. When Mussolini failed to obtain satisfaction at Geneva, on October 3 he invaded Abyssinia, and on November 18 the League, headed by Great Britain, enforced economic sanctions against Italy. Although they in no way impeded her, they threw Mussolini into Hitler's arms. In the end the 50-odd nations of the League were irretrievably discredited, and on March 7, 1936, Hitler declared the Franco-Soviet pact, which was then about to be ratified, a violation of the Treaty of Locarno, and reoccupied the demilitarized Rhineland.

The next crisis followed immediately. Since February, 1936, the misrule of the Popular Front Government in Spain had led to such chaos that, in order to quell anarchy, on July 18 General Francisco Franco raised his standard of revolt; he was supported by Italian troops, and the Republicans by Russian. Here again was an opportunity not to be missed by Hitler. On November 25 he entered into an Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, and directly it became apparent that Franco was winning, on March 13, 1938, he annexed Austria.

A fortnight later the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia demanded a restricted form of self-government, and were at once supported by Hitler, not only because of his racial principle, but because Czechoslovakia was a Franco-Soviet air pistol pointed at

Germany. He had not forgotten that, in 1919, the Allies had agreed that should Germany refuse to sign the peace treaty, she would be bombed from the Bohemian airfields. This crisis simmered until September 1, when Henlein, leader of the Sudeten Germans, visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden. The European atmosphere then grew so explosive that, on September 15 and again on the 22nd, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, visited Hitler. On the 24th, Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador in Paris, informed Lord Halifax, British Foreign Minister, that "All the best in France is against war, almost at any price," and that the sole group in favour of war was that of the Communists, who were "paid by Moscow." Finally, on September 29, with M. Daladier and Signor Mussolini, for the third time Chamberlain flew to Germany and met Hitler at Munich, and, in order to avert war, he agreed to the secession of the Sudetenland to Germany. Mutinies had broken out in the French army and, according to Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin, England "did not possess any Spitfires . . . had only one or two experimental Hurricanes, and only seven modern A.A. guns for the defence of London."

These never-ending crises generated a violent propaganda against Hitler. Foreign affairs lost all objectivity and became wrapped in an explosive animosity which so perturbed Dr. Goebbels, the German Minister of Propaganda, that he appealed to the American Ambassador in Berlin, who replied that the "most crucial thing that stood between any betterment of American Press relationships was the Jewish question."

It was in no way improved when, on November 7, 1938, a young Polish Jew assassinated the third secretary at the German Embassy in Paris, because the murder at once precipitated a pogrom against the Jews in Berlin which added fuel to anti-German sentiment in America. The situation as it was at the end of the year is so illuminatingly described by the Polish Ambassador at Washington, Count Jerzy Potocki, in a report to the Polish Foreign Office, dated January 12, 1939, that we will quote from it fully:

"Public opinion in America nowadays," he wrote, "expresses itself in an increasing hatred of everything . . . connected with National Socialism. Above all, propaganda here is entirely in Jewish hands . . ." and "when bearing public ignorance in mind, their propaganda is so effective that people here have no real

knowledge of the true state of affairs in Europe. . . . It is interesting to observe that in this carefully thought-out campaign—which is primarily conducted against National Socialism—no reference at all is made to Soviet Russia. If that country is mentioned, it is referred to in a friendly manner and people are given the impression that Soviet Russia is part of the democratic group of countries. Thanks to astute propaganda, public sympathy in the U.S.A. is entirely on the side of Red Spain. Side by side with this propaganda an artificial war-panic is created. . . . No effort is spared to impress upon the American mind that in the event of a world war the U.S.A. must take an active part in a struggle for freedom and democracy. President Roosevelt was first in the field to give expression to this hatred of Fascism. He had a two-fold purpose in mind: firstly, he wanted to divert American public opinion from difficult and complicated domestic problems. . . . Secondly, by creating a war-panic . . . he wanted to induce Americans to endorse his huge program of armaments. . . .

"Furthermore, the brutal treatment meted out to the Jews in Germany as well as the problem of the refugees are both factors which intensify the existing hatred of everything connected with German National Socialism. In this campaign of hatred, individual Jewish intellectuals such as Bernard Baruch, Lehman, Governor of New York State, Felix Frankfurter, the newly appointed Supreme Court Judge, Morgenthau, the Financial Secretary, and other well-known personal friends of Roosevelt have taken a prominent part in this campaign of hatred. All of them want the President to become the protagonist of human liberty, religious freedom and the right of free speech. . . . This particular group of people, who are all in highly placed American official positions and who are desirous of being representatives of 'true Americanism', and as 'Champions of Democracy', are, in point of fact, linked with international Jewry by ties incapable of being torn asunder. For international Jewry—so intimately concerned with the interests of its own race—President Roosevelt's 'ideal' role as a champion of human rights was indeed a godsend. In this way Jewry was able not only to establish a dangerous centre in the New World for the dissemination of hatred and enmity, but it also succeeded in dividing the world into two warlike camps. The whole problem is being tackled in a most mysterious manner. Roosevelt has been given the power to enable him to enliven American foreign policy and at the same time to create huge

reserves in armaments for a future war which the Jews are deliberately heading for."¹

Two days after Count Potocki penned this dispatch, he was assured by William C. Bullitt, American Ambassador to France, that, in the event of war, the United States would be prepared "to intervene actively on the side of Britain and France." Then came the next crisis, for soon after this assurance was given Hitler decided to complete the subjugation of Czechoslovakia. He fomented a *coup d'état* which liberated Slovakia, and on March 15, 1939, he occupied Prague and proclaimed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Not content with these aggressions, he had moved toward his final one. On October 24, 1938, Joachim von Ribbentrop, his Foreign Minister, suggested to the Polish Ambassador in Berlin that the Polish Government should agree to a "reunion of Danzig with the Reich" and should consent to the building of "an extraterritorial motor road and railway line across Pomorze"—that is, across the Polish Corridor—which 20 years earlier Mr. Lloyd George had declared, "must sooner or later lead to a new war in the east of Europe." Arguments followed, during which Mr. Chamberlain produced a formula whereby Britain, France, Poland, and Russia would sign a declaration that they "would act together in the event of further signs of German aggressive ambitions". Strangely enough, Josef Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, rejected the proposal and, equally inexplicable, when in its stead Beck suggested a bilateral agreement between Britain and Poland, Chamberlain agreed to it, and on March 27 the British Foreign Office informed Beck that if the Poles would undertake to defend themselves in event of a German attack, Britain would pledge "all her forces and resources to their assistance." This agreement was made public on March 31.

The effect Chamberlain's Polish guarantee had on Hitler was immediate; for though the latter was aware that an attack on Poland was likely to involve him in a war on two fronts, on April 3 he issued a directive to prepare an invasion of Poland after

¹ *German White Paper of Polish Documents*, New York (1940), pp. 29-31. Addressing the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, Hitler said: "I want to-day once again to make a prophecy: if the international Jewish financiers within and without Europe succeed once more in hurling the people into a world war, the result will be, not the Bolshevization of the World and with it a victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe." This was to be only too true, for according to Goebbels: "About 60 per cent. of them will have to be liquidated; only 40 per cent. can be used for forced labour" (*Diaries*, p. 103).

September 1, and on April 17, in order to avoid a two-front war, he opened negotiations with the Kremlin.

That by now war had been decided on by others besides Hitler is clear; for Karl von Weigand, the doyen of American journalists in Europe, informs us that, on April 25, he was called to the American Embassy in Paris and told by Bullitt, "War in Europe has been decided upon. Poland", he said, "had an assurance of the support of Britain and France, and would yield to no demands from Germany. America," he predicted, "would be in the war after Britain and France entered it."¹ This statement is corroborated by *The White House Papers of Harry Hopkins*, in which their editor says that, about this time, Winston Churchill told Bernard Baruch: "War is coming very soon. We will be in it and you (the United States) will be in it. You (Baruch) will be running the show over there, but I will be on the sidelines over here."

Throughout the summer the crisis fluctuated, and both Chamberlain and Hitler bid for Russian support; the one to enable him to honour his Polish pledge, and the other to avert a two-front war. At length on August 23 the latter won; that day a treaty of non-aggression was signed in Moscow between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and in accordance with a secret protocol, Poland was to be divided between Germany and Russia. On the 24th the treaty was published, and on the following day the Anglo-Polish Agreement of March 27 was formally signed.

On September 1 – the anniversary of Sedan – without a declaration of war, German troops crossed into Poland, and President Roosevelt issued an appeal to Britain, France, Germany, and Poland to refrain from bombing unfortified cities and civil populations. Hitler immediately endorsed the President's plea, and on the 2nd the British and French governments issued a declaration in which they stated that they were in sympathy with the humanitarian sentiments expressed by the President.

At 9 a.m. on September 3 the British Ambassador in Berlin delivered an ultimatum to the German Foreign Office that unless before 11 a.m. assurances were given of a suspension of hostilities, Britain would declare war on Germany. At noon the French

¹ The writer met von Weigand in Berlin on April 19, and was told by him that he had learnt from a high authority that Germany expected to overrun Poland in a minimum of three weeks or a maximum of six: that there would be no attack on the Western Front, and that Italy would probably remain neutral. Of the British guarantee to Poland he said: "Well, I guess your Mr. Prime Minister has made the biggest blunder in your history since you passed the Stamp Act."

Ambassador handed in a similar ultimatum to expire at 5 p.m. Both were unanswered.

When Hitler received the British challenge he sat in silence unmoved, and when Paul Schmidt, his interpreter, left the room, Göring turned to him and said: "If we lose this war, then God have mercy on us."

MAJOR-GENERAL J. F. C. FULLER
C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

The Decisive Battles of the Western World

and their influence upon history

VOLUME TWO

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J F C FULLER

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EDITED BY JOHN TERRAINE

